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Hagel Meets with National Park Service Officials about Niobrara River

Washington, D.C. — U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) on Wednesday met with National Park Service (NPS) officials to discuss his concerns about the management of the Niobrara National Scenic River.

“It is imperative that the National Park Service respect the rights of the local citizens who live on the Niobrara and work everyday to conserve it,” said Hagel. “I believe that we have come to an understanding which will ensure that the Park Service meets their obligations to consult with the Niobrara Council in managing the river.”

Hagel requested the meeting, which was held in his Washington office and attended by John Haubert of the National Park Service, Paul Hedren, Superintendent of the Niobrara National Scenic River, and Bruce Evans, a professional staff member of the Senate subcommittee which funds the Park Service.

“The people who live on and care for the river must not be marginalized,” added Hagel. “I believe that the Park Service understands the importance of including the Niobrara Council in decision-making and treating the Council and local citizens with the respect they deserve as the stewards of the river.”

As intended by Congress, the Niobrara Council was established after passage of the Niobrara Scenic River Designation Act of 1991, and received federal, state and local funding beginning in 1998. The Council, which involves local people in the management of the Niobrara, was created to allay concerns that federal, top-down management of the river would occur upon its designation as a national scenic river.

Hagel met earlier this month with the Niobrara Council in Valentine, Nebraska. In his meeting with the Park Service yesterday, Hagel relayed the concerns expressed by the Council and also sent a letter to National Park Service Director Robert Stanton to address these concerns in writing. In the letter, Hagel asked Director Stanton to explain how the NPS will consult with the Niobrara Council in the future and to explain the role of the Council in the NPS’s plans for “full scale operations” on the river.